ImproVal

Improving Validation
in the Voluntary Sector

Validation Tools for Volunteers

Compendium

August
2019

Platform of volunteer centres and organisations, Slovakia
(Stupava: Platforma dobrovoľníckych centier a organizácií)

Author: Mária Joklová

Internal reviewers:

Jo Peeters; Edos Foundation
Pauline Boivin; Lifelong Learning Platform
Marion Fields, Sivis Study Centre

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Background information

More and more people and organisations are becoming aware of the educational value of volunteering, and of validation opportunities for the voluntary sector. However, their use and impact is largely unknown. Furthermore, the risk of reinventing the wheel by setting up new projects is evident, and on the other hand, there are ''missing links'' e.g. in connecting the validation methods with the European Guidelines or instruments like the European Qualification Framework or in forms of volunteering that are not recognised.

The **Improving Validation in the Voluntary Sector (ImproVal) project** (Sept. 2018 – August 2020) sets out to improve the practice of validation of learning outcomes in the European voluntary sector. Its focus lies in making known existing tools for validation and practice on the recognition of skills gained by volunteering, and the methods for the validation of monitoring and by participating in validation processes, that in this case volunteers, have made.

Its focus lies in making known existing tools, practices and methods for the recognition, monitoring and validation of skills gained by volunteering.

By making the benefits and tools of validation more known, the anticipated result is that more adults can use skills and competences acquired by volunteering to enter formal education and towards upskilling. The compendium also offers policy recommendations to advance the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. By doing so we wish to strengthen the connection between validation in the voluntary sector and the European recommendations for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Volunteering can be described as many things:

"Helping" and "reaching out" to mention a few, but it is also to a great extent about non-formal and informal learning. Competences acquired through volunteering activities need to be recognised in society. The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning (hereafter referred to as informal learning) is highly relevant in the European educational area.

This is widely acknowledged on the EU level, as written in these policy documents:

- ''The role of voluntary activities in social policy'', Council of the European Union (October 2011)
- ''Volunteering: passport to a job?'', Committee on culture and education of the European Parliament (June 2012)
- ''Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning'' (December 2012)
- ''Towards a European area of skills and qualifications'', European Commission (June 2014)
- ''Validation of skills and qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning'', European Economic and Social Committee (September 2015)

Since the start of the Erasmus+ Programme, there have been (at least) 15 projects that have dealt in one way or another with the validation of skills/competences of volunteers. More than 50 organisations in 20 EU member states were involved in these projects.

The partnership has identified the following prior projects: Euravon - Volcar - VaPoVo - e-VOC - ReValue - Volunteer Validation - Global Recognition - Lever - Lever Up - GREAT - CivCil - Volunteering Validation Highway - Destination E-validation - Innoval - I've Experienced.

The **Improving Validation in the Voluntary Sector** (ImproVal) project aims to provide a synthesis of work undertaken on this issue so far. It will do so by bringing together the coordinators of a number of previous validation projects, making known the methods, tools and thinking behind validation of learning in the voluntary sector, in a validation compendium, conducting a small-scale study on the usefulness of validation for volunteers, and by encouraging a dialogue between relevant stakeholders locally, nationally and at a European level.

Compendium's Aims

The **Validation Tools for Volunteers Compendium** is the first result of the ImproVal project. The aim is to help making validation better known and to promote existing tools.

The Compendium brings together the results of mapping of prior projects and presenting various tools for validation in the voluntary sector.

The **anticipated impact** is that more and new users will find and use already existing tools for validation. They will better understand which ones best fit their needs. This compendium is open for wide use, so it has high transferability potential.

Mapping process of existing validation tools

The preparation of the mapping process took place from October to December 2018. The preparation included a template design for collecting data and a division of 28 EU Member States among the project partners. The preparation included modifications and finalisation of the template for collecting data. The data collection template was finalised in December 2018. The data collection took place in January 2019.

The questionnaires were sent out and collected by the ImproVal project partners via partners' networks (e-mails or face-to-face interviews) to organisation that managed the tools.

To analyse the collected data, we used methods of statistical analysis, synthesis and comparison.

During the mapping process we focused on the following characteristics and findings:

1. Type of the tool
2. Aim / Purpose of the tool
3. Connection with European and National qualification frameworks
4. Focus assessment
5. Type of skills
6. Assessment and validation process
7. Support needed
8. Language/s of validation tool
9. Year when the tool was developed
10. How many volunteers have used the tool since the creation of the tool

The results of the mapping process are included in the following annexes:

1. Overview of validation tools included in the statistical analysis (Annex 1)
2. Results of analysis of collected data
3. Collection of tools (Annex 2)

The overview of collected validation tools includes the information:

- tools to validate volunteering skills and competences captured during mapping
- the number of instruments identified within the countries surveyed, including those found at European/International level
- findings in which EU countries we have not found any instrument
- instruments exclusively dedicated to volunteering
- the language options of validation tools

Result of analysis of the collected data

Out of the 28 EU Member States, we have collected a total of 49 validation tools in 20 EU countries.

In view of their overall international dimension (focus, usability, linguistic support), we have identified 8 instruments as instruments that go beyond the national frameworks of individual EU Member States and have a pan-European impact.

In 8 EU countries, we did not find any tool that would focus on validating the skills and competences acquired in volunteering.

We included 46 of the 49 validation tools obtained in the mapping process into the statistical analysis. When analysing the tools, we found that by their content they do not meet the criteria of a validation tool to recognise and validate acquired skills. However, from the point of view of this compendium they were so interesting that we included them in the toolkit.

The following 3 validation tools were not included in the statistical analysis:

1. TimeHeroes (Bulgaria) - https://timeheroes.org/bg/browse
2. Competence game and cards (Denmark) - https://www.daea.dk/themes/prior-learning/tools/competence-game-and-cards/
3. The New EUroPaSS – New Europass, promote your Soft Skills with Open Badges project we annotated as a "Future project" (2018 – 2020) - https://softskills4.eu/

T1   Number of validation tools in EU countries included to analysis

	Country	Number of tools per country
1	Austria	1
2	Belgium	5
3	Croatia	1
4	Czechia	1
5	Denmark	1
6	Estonia	1
7	Finland	2
8	France	6
9	Germany	2
10	Hungary	1
11	Italy	3
12	Luxembourg	3
13	Netherlands	2
14	Poland	1
15	Portugal	2
16	Romania	1
17	Slovakia	1
18	Slovenia	1
19	Spain	1
20	United Kingdom	2
	European level	8
	Total	46

We found no validation tools in the following 8 EU countries: **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Malta** and **Sweden**.

More than half of all collected tools 54% were focused on the validation of volunteers' learning outcomes specifically, whereas 46% on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in general. The latter was hence not only addressing volunteers but open to anyone who acquired competences outside the formal education system. 19 tools "are only available at national level and 6 are available in several EU countries, therefore they are considered to a certain extent to be "European tools".

Collection of **validation tools** in the **voluntary sector**
Key findings

49 validation tools
from 20 EU countries

aim of the tools

work **80%**
personal development **54%**
formal education **35%**

implemented in several EU countries
EU tools 6

tools available in languages **22**

during the process
require support **59%**

tools available online **61%**

European and/or national
linked to qualification frameworks **60%**
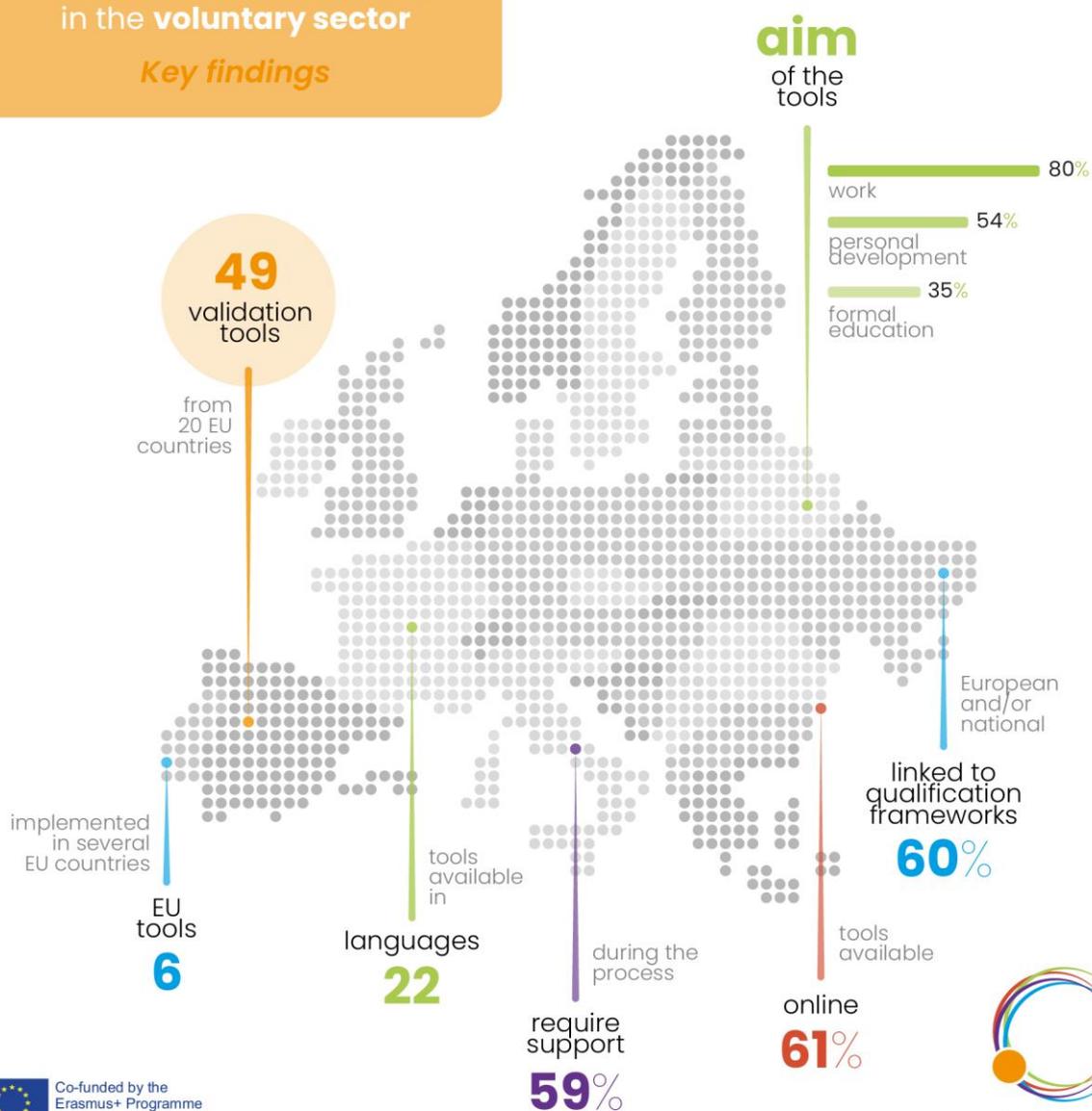
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	The tools focusing on validation in volunteering	Country
1	**Freiwilligenpass** Volunteering Passport	Austria
2	**Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim kroz volontiranje** Certificate of competences acquired through volunteering	Croatia
3	**Im-prove**	Czechia
4	**Frivillighedskompetencer** Volunteering competences	Denmark
5	**Vabatahtliku pass** Volunteer passport	Estonia
6	**Le passeport bénévole** The volunteer passport	France
7	**Validation des acquis de l'expérience bénévole (VAEb)** Validation of acquired experience	France
8	**Carnet de Vie du Bénévole**	France
9	**Qualipass**	Germany
10	**Önkentes Portfolió** Volunteer portfolio	Hungary
11	**Attitude**	Italy
12	**Volabo**	Italy
13	**Glore**	Italy
14	**"EVC" procedure for volunteering** "VPL" procedure for volunteering	Netherlands
15	**Europass voor vrijwilligers**	Netherlands
16	**Volunteering Map** VoluntPass	Romania
17	**D-Zručnosti pre zamestnanie** V-Skills for employment	Slovakia
18	**Vol+**	Spain
19	**Awards Network**	UK
	European level	
20	**LeverUp**	EU

21	EASY" Evaluate Soft Skills in International Youth volunteering"	EU
22	Voyce project - Volunteering Youth: routes and tools for Competence's Emersion	EU
23	Youth Pass	EU
24	Destination eValidation (DesTeVa)	EU
25	Reveal2	EU

Types of tools

As regards the typology of tools, we based them on the simple need of people working with volunteers themselves to get practical information about the basis on which the tool works, how it is available, and what it takes to use it. Most of the tools that have been found are available online. On the other hand, we have also considered tools available outside the on-line space (e.g. face-to-face meetings, interviews, etc.). We also identified the type of tools based on the combination of online and off-line access during the validation.

On-line tools include:

- Websites, platforms
- Mobile phone applications
- Online tutoring

These are validation tools available most often in the form of e-portfolio / document folder, test (forms, questionnaires), printed paper-based documents, certificates, attestations, publications (guides, handbooks).

Off-line tools are based on personal participation included options:

- Individual/group face to face meetings
- Consultations
- Interviews
- Events
- Seminars
- Workshops
- Practical tests
- Observations
- Role plays, etc.

G1   Types of tools

Type of tool

- Online
- Self-assessment tool, portfolio without information about type online/offline
- Combination of online and offline
- Offline
- N/A
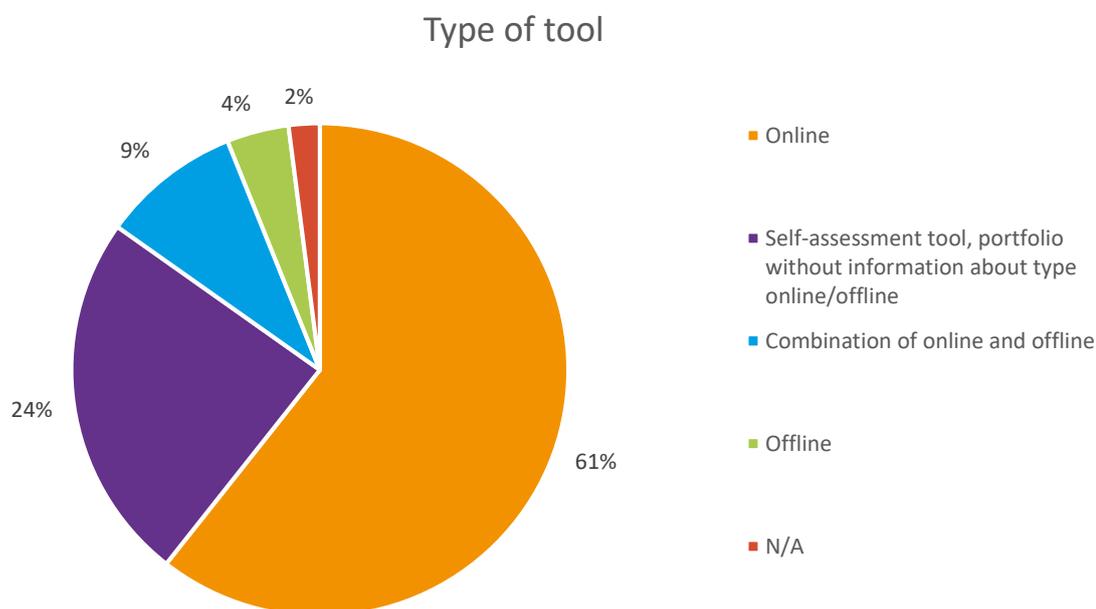
We identified up to 61% of the on-line type among validation tools analysed. Only 4% of the tools require off-line access in the validation process (the Luxembourg-based "Bilan de compétences" and Belgian "Validation des acquis de l'expérience - Ervaringbewijs").

We identified 9% of the tools based on the combination of on-line and off-line access during the validation.

No information is available on 2% of the tools.

24% of the tools were labelled as "self-assessment tools" or "portfolios" in the typology without giving any other information.

Aim / Purpose of the tools

We investigated what the results of the skills and knowledge validation process should be primarily used for. The validation results can be used by the participant:

- For a future job,
- In formal education,
- For personal development.

T3 Aim of the tools

Aim / Purpose of the tool	N	Total	%
Work	37	46	80
Formal education	16	46	35
Personal development	25	46	54
Combination of 2 options	13	46	30
Combination of all 3 options	9	46	20
N/A	1	46	2

We have found that the largest percentage of validation tools is primarily used for the labour market. More than half of the tools have the purpose of assessing and/or fostering competences for the personal development of the volunteers. Nearly 30% pursue two aims. 20% of all validation tools focus on all 3 areas of use – work, formal study and personal development.

Connection with European and National Qualification Frameworks

We then mapped the link of Validation tools with the **European** and/or **National Qualification Frameworks**.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) defines the **European Qualification Frameworks (EQF)** as a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems. Covering qualifications at all levels and in all sub-systems of education and training, the EQF provides a comprehensive overview over qualifications in the 39 European countries currently involved in its implementation[1].

The **National Qualification Frameworks (NQF)**, according to CEDEFOP, "help make qualifications easier to understand and compare. They can also encourage countries to rethink and reform national policy and practice on education, training and lifelong learning. National qualification frameworks (NQFs) classify qualifications by level, based on learning outcomes. This classification reflects the content and profile of qualifications - that is, what the holder of a certificate or diploma is expected to know,

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[1] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

understand, and be able to do. The learning outcomes approach also ensures that education and training sub-systems are open to one another. Thus, it allows people to move more easily between education and training institutions and sectors."[2]

G2 Connection with European and/or National Qualifications Frameworks

Connection with Qualifications Frameworks

- European Qualifications Framework
- National Qualifications Framework
- Combination NQF and EQF
- Without connection
- N/A
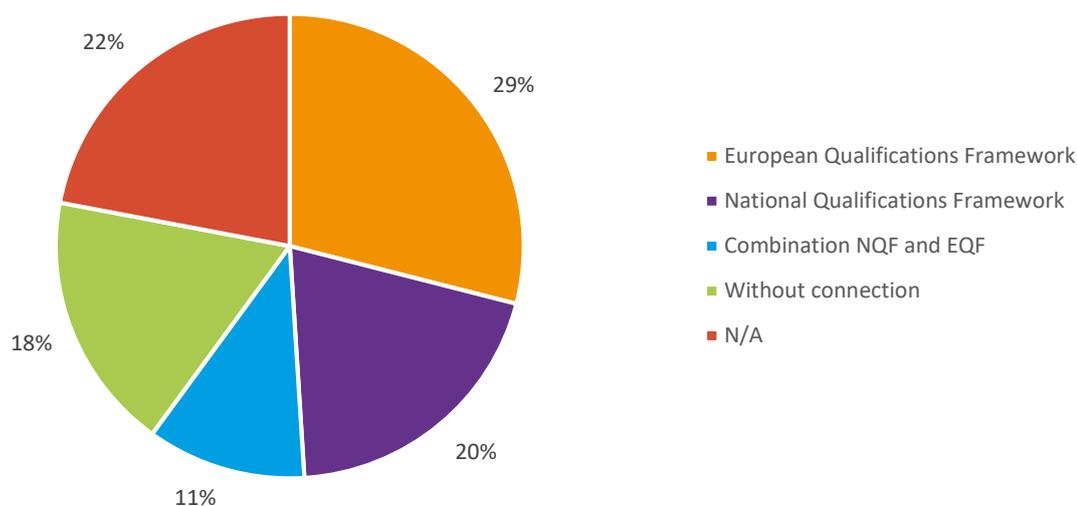
We found that up to 60% of the tools have links to one or both the qualification frameworks. 18% of the tools are unconnected. 24% failed to provide information.

Holistic approach or specific skills?

We have investigated whether the validation process focuses on one or certain skills specifically or if it is comprehensive to a whole set of skills in a "holistic" way.

Holistic approaches are approaches that assess the entire set of competences individuals gain through volunteering whereas assessment for specific skills focus on one or several skills.

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[2] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf

G3 Assessment focus of the tools

Assessment focus of the tools

2%

18%

80%

- Holistic approach
- Specific skills
- N/A
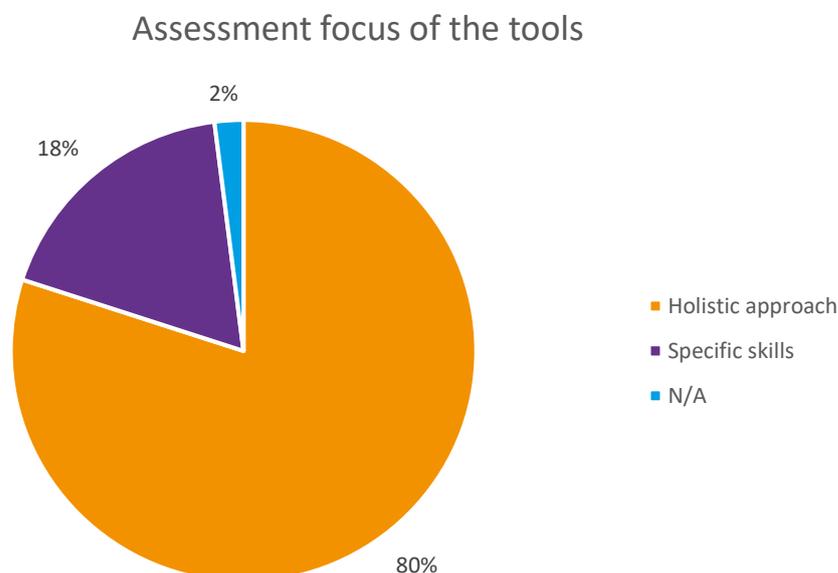
We found that most validation tools (80%) use a holistic approach. 18% of the tools analysed focus on the validation of specific skills.

Type of skills

Soft skills, also referred to as "**transversal skills**", are skills that can be used across sectors in different work positions and functions, as well as in an individuals' personal life. Therefore, they are not applicable to a specific job as opposed to "vocational skills". Soft and transversal skills are, for example, communication, creative thinking, work ethic, teamwork, networking, decision-making, positivity, time management, motivation, flexibility, problem-solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution.

**Vocational skills / Job skills** are understood as abilities that allow an employee to excel in a particular job.

For example, architects need CAD (computer-aided design) skills, construction workers need to know how to use a variety of tools, and for an IT professional programming skills are often essential.

We found that half of the tools address soft skills only or vocational skills only. The other half of the tools address both.

G4 Types of skills

Types of skills

- Soft skills
- Vocational skills
- Both
- N/A
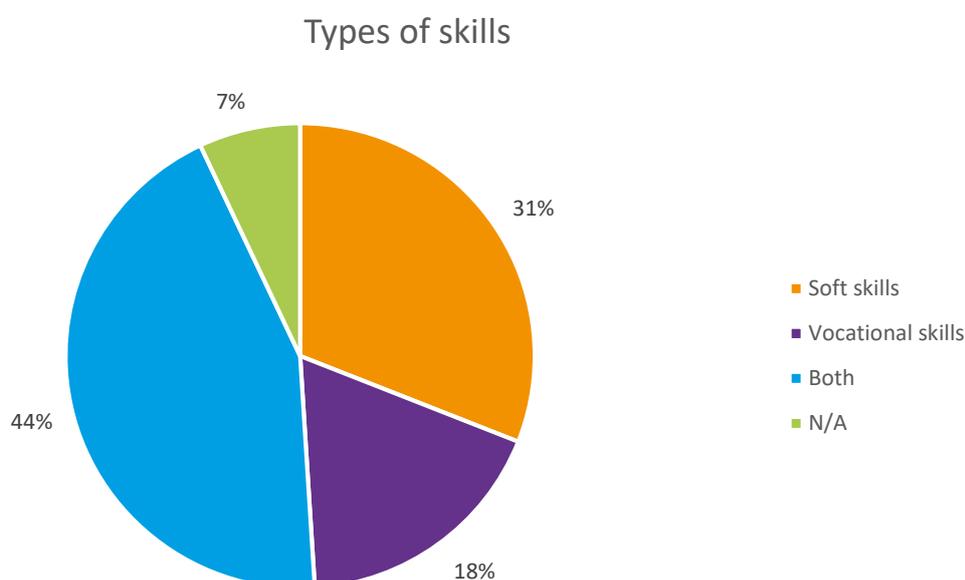
Steps in the validation process

When mapping the assessment and validation process we based this on the official document of the Council of the European Union "Council recommendations of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning".

The document includes, as appropriate, the following elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with their needs:

1. IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
2. DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
3. ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non- formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.

These elements of identification, documentation, assessment and certification have been examined as steps during the assessment and validation process. We investigated how many of the steps the validation tools use throughout the recognition and validation process.

G5 Steps in the validation process

Assessment and validation process

Legend:
- All 4 steps
- Only 3 steps
- Only 2 steps
- Only 1 step
- N/A
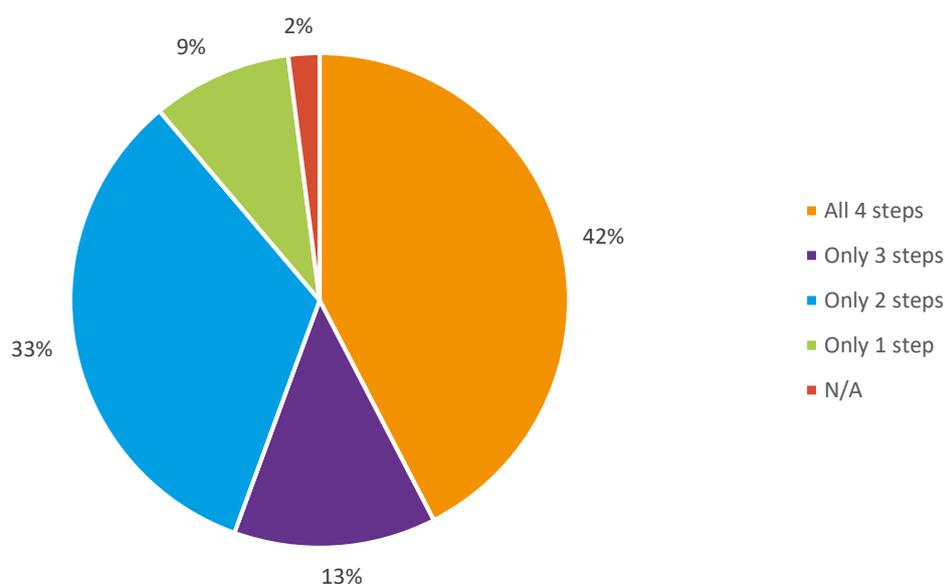
We found that all 4 steps are used in up to 43% of validation tools. On the contrary, only a very low percentage of validation tools uses only one of the steps.

Support needed

We mapped if support is necessary in the process of validation and who should provide it if so. We found that up to 58% of validation tools examined require support throughout the process of recognition and validation. Among them, "self-assessment" was most often combined with the following kinds of support:

- Responsible person within the host organisation
- HR Management/Career advisor
- Peer / another volunteer

- Mentor
- Volunteer co-ordinator/manager/supervisor
- Web platform behind the tool
- Counsellor
- Tutor
- Assessor
- Authorising / certification body
- Validation centre
- University

These types of support are most often provided in the form of documentary evidence, written statements, signatures, confirmations, verifications, recommendations, but also through personal / online meetings, interviews and consultations.

Some validation tools require support throughout the validation process, some only in some of its phases.

Some validation tools provide support as an optional option. Some only provide it for a certain degree / level.

Information on support was not available in 20% of validation tools.

G6 Support needed

Support needed

- Yes
- No
- N/A
- Only in advanced level
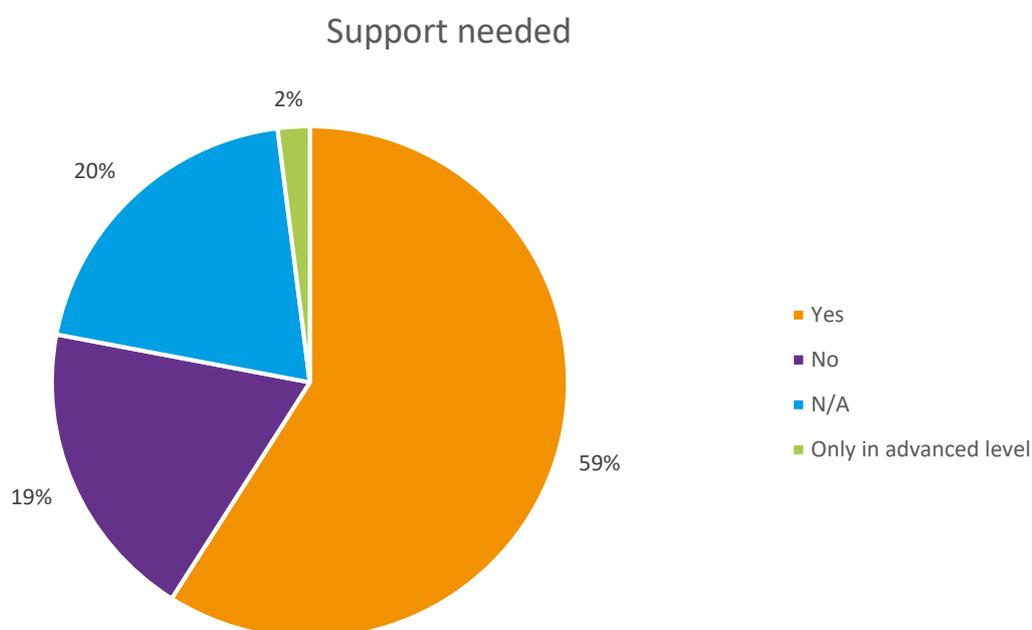
Language of validation tools

T4   Overview of the languages used in the validation tools

N°	Language	N°	Language
1	English	12	Croatian
2	German	13	Serbian
3	French	14	Romanian
4	Italian	15	Danish
5	Spanish	16	Finnish
6	Portuguese	17	Swedish
7	Polish	18	Estonian
8	Slovak	19	Russian
9	Czech	20	Luxembourgish
10	Hungarian	21	Dutch
11	Slovenian	22	Turkish

T5   Language options in validation tools

Language options	N	%
Only in the language of the country of origin	25	54
1 - 4 languages	38	83
4 and > languages	5	11
all or almost all European languages	2	4
Only in English	4	9
English in combination with another language/s	10	22

We found that more than half (54%) of the validation tools provide the possibility to use the tool only in the language of the country of origin. Only a small percentage of the tools appeared in almost all European languages or in English.

All / almost all European languages can be used for the **Youth Pass** and **European Skills Passport (Europass)**.

Tools existing only in English include **European portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers**; A**wards Network**; **Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record** and **Glore**.

The combination of English with another language has proven to be a relatively frequent option, which is enabled by up to 22% of validation tools. The highest percentage was shown in 4 languages. Up to 83% of validation tools provide this option.

Year of development

G6   Information about year of development

Information about year of development

- Information on the year when the tool was developed available
- Information on the year when the tool was developed not available
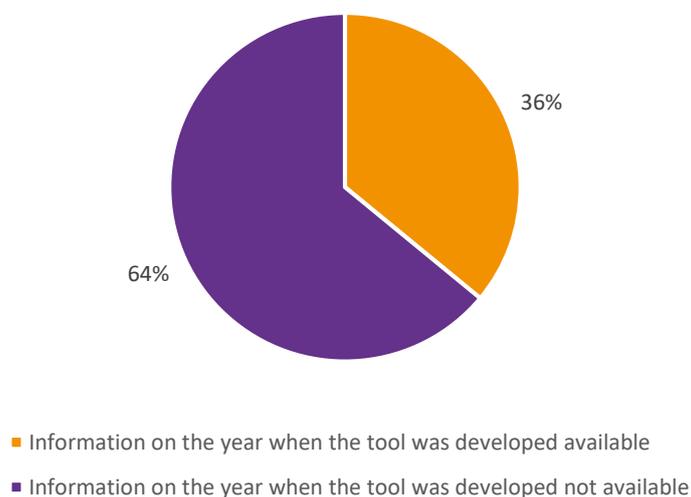
Chart G6 gives the findings in how many cases we received information about the year in which the validation tool was created. This information could not be found in 65% of the tools. T6 lists 35 tools with the year of development listed. Among them, those validation tools that are specifically focused on volunteering are colour-coded.

T6 List of tools with the listed year of development

* Tools focused specifically on volunteering are marked in red

N°	Title of the tool	Year of development
1	**European Skills Passport / Europass** (Europass mobility)	in the late 1990s
2	**Qualipass**	2002
3	**Validation des compétences** Validation of competences	2003
4	**Freiwilligenpass** Volunteering Passport	2005
5	**Sistema Nacional de Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação** **de Competências (Sistema RVCC)** National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)	2005
6	**Frivillighedskompetencer** Volunteering competences	2006
7	**NäytönPaikka** A chance to show your skills	2007
8	**Le passeport bénévole** The volunteer passport	2007
9	**Attestation et Portfolio de l'Engagement** The Engagement Portfolio	2007
10	**Nefiks** Nefiks booklet	2008
11	**Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL)** **Record®**	2008
12	**Awards Network**	2008
13	**European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers**	2009
14	**Vabatahtliku pass** Volunteer passport	2010
15	**"EVC" procedure for volunteering** "VPL" procedure for volunteering	2010
16	**Valorise-toi** Empower yourself	2011
17	**Le portefeuille de compétences** The competences portfolio	2011

18	**Önkentes Portfolió** Volunteer portfolio	2011
19	**The scout leader's skills tool** The scout leader's skills tool	2012
20	**Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim kroz volontiranje** Certificate of competences acquired through volunteering	2013
21	**D-Zručnosti pre zamestnanie** V-Skills for employment	2013
22	**Attitude**	2014
23	**Vol+**	2014
24	**Destination eValidation (DesTeVa)**	2014
25	**Reveal2**	2014
26	**Kompetenz-/Validierungsdossier ConCert**	2015
27	**Programa Qualifica / Qualifica Passport** Qualifying Programme	2015
28	**Im-prove**	2016
29	**Lever Basic – Test kompetencji miękkich** Lever Basic - Soft competence test	2016
30	**Volunteering Map** VoluntPass	2016
31	**LeverUp** zaujímavé!	2016
32	**Sampo-ohjaussivusto** Sampo – guidance site	2018
33	**Glore**	2018
34	**EASY "Evaluate Soft Skills in International Youth volunteering"**	2018
35	**Voyce project** (Volunteering Youth: routes and tools for Competence's Emersion)	2018

Number of users since creation of the tool

Information about the number of users of a tool was not available in 34 (75%) cases. We found the information only in 11 (24%) tools. Among them, those validation tools that are specifically focused on volunteering are colour-coded.

T7   List of validation tools showing numbers of users

* Tools focused specifically on volunteering are marked in red

N°	Title of the tool	Country	Number of users of the tool
1	**Nefiks** Nefiks booklet	Slovenia	at least 16 000
2	**Volunteering Map** VoluntPass	Romania	2760
3	**The scout leader's skills tool** The scout leader's skills tool	Belgium	700
4	**EASY "Evaluate Soft Skills in International Youth volunteering"**	Italy/European	600
5	**Im-prove**	Czech Republic	483
6	**Lever Basic – Test kompetencji miękkich** Lever Basic - Soft competence test	Poland	432
7	**D-Zručnosti pre zamestnanie** V-Skills for employment	Slovakia	250
8	**Attitude**	Italy	138
9	**Vol+**	Spain	120
10	**Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim kroz volontiranje** Certificate of competences acquired through volunteering	Croatia	69 (through web app)
11	**Glore**	Italy	12